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ABSTRACT

At present there is a lack of theory that would direct curriculum research, and the National Institute of Education (NIE) could profitably direct its efforts toward the development of curriculum and instructional theories. NIE's thrust into curriculum, in addition, would be most acceptable if it were to dexterously guide curriculum development, not by supporting the development of full curriculums, but supporting the fashioning of explanatory models that would stimulate scholars and teachers to develop the entire curriculum with the assistance of the public sector, e.g., foundations and publishers. (DS)

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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: John Schaffarzick

FROM: Paul F-Brandwein

DATE: November 3, 1976

RE: A useful tactic in stimulating curriculum change

Perhaps the function of the innovator is to go too far so that others may go far enough. Nevertheless, the function of the innovator in curriculum is to create and disseminate a meaningful world. Since curriculum is, perhaps, one of the policy-sciences, proof of effectiveness, as it were, is not determined experimentally (in the sense of the physical sciences) but on engineering principles (does it work in relation to objectives). Further, since curriculum is an intervention in the social order, the determination, whether it works or not, is first conditioned on its acceptability within species of communities. It is simplistic to state, but necessary to do so, if a curriculum is not acceptable to a sufficient

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number of communities, it would be difficult to determine whether it works. Nevertheless, to extrapolate one of Eltinge Morrison's remarks, curriculum is, in a sense, the forcing of social change through technological change.

It would seem clear to those of us who have "invented" and "developed" curriculums (and this writer is one of those who has accepted this opportunity, both as a participant in curriculum innovation sponsored by government and/or by the private sector) that considerable risk accompanies responsibility and opportunity. The risk entertained embraces rejection not only by local and state Boards of Education, by peer-colleagues, but is accompanied by uncomplimentary criticism by press and public. One could paint the tight-rope, at length, but it suffices to say that curriculum innovators cannot escape the pillory of public opinion -- or its praise -- or its indifference. Further policy-statements, however wise, do not fit all times or all decades. (For example, some thirty years ago, Harold Rugg was villified for developing a Social Sciences program which is similar to one now moderately acceptable to the schools, The Social Sciences: Concepts and Values. MACOS, on the other hand,

is receiving precisely the attention Harold Rugg suffered.) It is patently clear to me that for any given period, policy-statements -- if offered up by a variety of curriculum experts -- will span the normal curve. Nevertheless, the responsibility of a National Institute given over to advancing Education -- or Schooling -- (the two are not the same in intent and content) -- is to entertain acceptable or palatable risk -- "acceptable" to be defined by those who are in position to take the risk.

At present, by far and large, publishers -- defined as scholars, teachers, editors, producers, marketing agents -- form the complex which develops most curriculums utilized in the schools. It will not do to speculate that publishers do not advance the art-science of curriculum; some do, some don't. But surely change in curriculum changes instructed learning; that is, what happens to our young in schools. If NIE wishes to be part of this effort, it should advance curricular art-science by supporting those who put themselves forward with useful plans, strategies, and tactics.

A useful tactic -- perhaps

In Britain, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Russia, NIE might well be required to develop curriculums. In the United States with local control, its purposes are apparently to develop curriculums -- if it chooses to do so -- which are acceptable to local communities. However, the prestige of NIE, and the scholars it would support, as well as the funds it would utilize for promotion -- in short, the pressures of prestige -- do not permit fair and even-handed choice by communities who do not have the advice of qualified curriculum experts. Further, if the curriculum "offends" because it is a bit far-sighted for one or more political groups represented in Congress, the curriculum may be rejected out-of-hand, many times unjustly. I suggest then two tactics; I'm certain there are others which would make it possible for NIE to enter the evolutionary (as distinguished from revolutionary) role of advancing teaching-learning.

Tactic I: Development of Curricular Theory

At present, there is a lack of theory which would direct research. These are statements which are normative, some tend to be factual but one does not find statements which own up to being "theories." To demonstrate my fool-hardiness, let me state two: one directed at curriculum, the other at instructed learning (teaching). Neither of them are satisfactory but each is an "explanatory model" of what might pass for curricular or teaching theory. One cannot presume what explanatory power such theories, properly researched and developed, would have in innovating curriculums. In any event, development of theory, enormously important, entails acceptable risk and should be, in my opinion, a responsibility acceptable to NIE.

A Theory of Curriculum

> In the design of a curriculum, non-random ordering is imposed on domains of experience; in turn these are reconciled in compatible orders (systems of meaning) designed to increase the effectiveness of instructed learning described in objectives defining

a specified change in behavior.

A Theory of Instructed Learning

In any specified act of instructed learning (teaching) a new environment is created out of familiar objects and events; in responding to the changed environment a learner gains capacities and/or attitudes which are not demonstrably the result of a prior unit of instructed learning.

Tactic II: Development of Explanatory Models

It seems to me that NIE's thrust into curriculum would be most acceptable if it were to guide dexterously curriculum development, not by supporting the development of full curriculums, but supporting the fashioning of explanatory models which would stimulate scholars, teachers (performers), to develop the entire curriculum

with the assistance of the public sector -- for example, foundations and publishers. Such explanatory models might consist of

A. A "white paper" developing an "explanatory model"; that is, developing a curricular model with notes on undergirding philosophy and practice.

B. A sufficient sampling of instructional materials to explicate the curricular model. These might be one "textbook" or "laboratory materials" or "book" developing one concept in increasing complexity ascending levels of abstraction (example levels Kg-6) in an elementary school curriculum; or a unit of study in a high school curriculum. The point is that the entire curriculum would not be developed by NIE.

C. Evaluation data to demonstrate the effectiveness of A and B.

To explicate Tactic II, I attach a "white paper," an "explanatory model" of three curriculums, one in the "elementary sciences," one in the "elementary humanities," and one in Ekistics. (I do not propose to defend their objective, but offer them as "types of explanatory models.") These "white papers" have assisted in explaining the design of the two curriculums so that authors, consultant-scholars, editors, producers could develop the entire curriculum. In any event, these "white papers" were, in effect, proposals to a curriculum producer (a publisher) who has acted upon each one -- publishing the instructional materials -- and the modes of instruction as well.

It might well be, if NIE did adopt such a tactic, it might include the reservation that if curriculum producers did not

a. Adopt the proposal within a given period of time (time to be determined), and

b. A sufficient number of schools (number to be determined) were interested in utilizing the curriculum, then NIE would indeed be

> compelled to subvent the publication of such a curriculum utilizing such publishers as were interested.

In sum, in suggesting these two tactics, I am proposing that NIE enter upon curriculum innovation at the earliest.

Ryland W. Crary, in his Humanizing the School Curriculum Theory and Development (Knopf, 1969, page 158), poignantly remarks:

> "Curriculum change demands experimentation, creativity, initiative, self-confidence, daring and responsibility. Unfortunately, these are not virtues usually associated with civil service."

I disagree. An appropriate, wise, and effective tactic would make it otherwise. I am certain NIE could devise such a tactic -- once it resolved the dilemmas, which consideration of policy and strategy entail.